

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

Vol. 44, No. 3

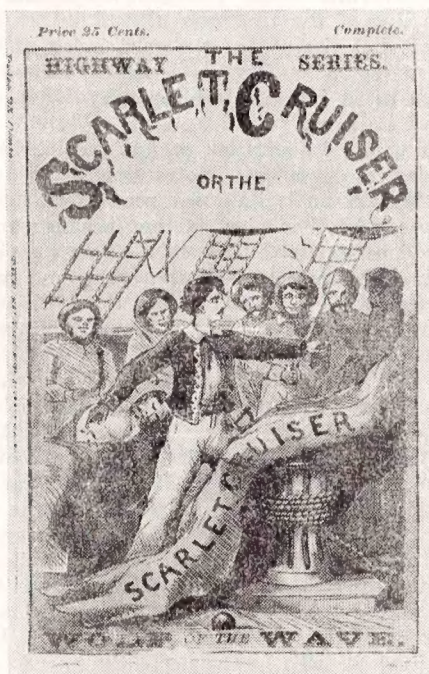
March 15, 1975

Whole No. 510

Biographical Reflections

By Denis R. Rogers

(Conclusion)



DIME NOVEL SKETCHES NO. 182

HIGHWAY SERIES

Publisher: Hilton & Co., 128 Nassau St., New York, N. Y. Issues: 6 (highest number seen). Dates: 1870's. Schedule of Issue: unknown. Size: 9¾x6¼". Pages: 96 to 100. Price: 25c. Illustration: Pictorial colored cover with bright yellowish-orange border. Contents: No. 1 Red Ralph, 2. Leonore, the Highwayman's Bride, 3. Black Wolf; or, Jonathan Wild and Dick Turpin, 4. The Yellow Band; or, Jack Sheppard's Feats, 5. May Turpin, Queen of the Highway, 6. The Scarlet Cruiser; or, The Wolf of the Wave.

Biographical Reflections

By Denis R. Rogers

(Conclusion)

The card index of main and sub-titles was prepared by me in order to build up the information against the time when I came to write the final manuscript. Obviously such an index is essential for the users of a bibliography in depth of any prolific author.

The record books of works provide the bibliographical meat for "A Guide to Edward S. Ellis" and the splits between major and minor works and between works definitely, probably and possibly by an ascribed to the author flows from an early decision about the scope of the work. With hindsight I now wish that I had used loose leaf books to facilitate periodical chronological re-arrangement.

The card index of first lines of texts, as was used by the late Professor Johannsen in compiling "The House of Beadle and Adams," is designed for the identification of reprints under changed titles and/or by-lines. Sometimes even the first line of the text was altered in the reprint—e.g., where abridgement occurred—but the use of the card index of principal characters ensures that few such reprints escape detection. Moreover the principal characters will be incorporated into the bibliography itself as an identification aid for the benefit of its users.

The notebook of useful information assists me in the preparation of explanatory and supplementary notes. Notes tend to arouse strong feelings. One view is that notes are an irritant for readers and so should be kept to the absolute minimum. Another view is that because notes illumine a bibliography, they should be as full as possible. My own view is that the case for notes depends in large measure on the scope and nature of the bibliography. In a simple first book edition record the addition of notes may well be little more than a superficial gloss. For a bibliography in depth the provision of fairly copious notes is well nigh unavoidable.

Another aspect arousing acrimony is where notes should be placed in a bibliography. Some favor setting them out at the foot of the pages on which reference is made to them in the text. Their argument is that the reader should not have to turn elsewhere in order to read a footnote. Others favor placing the notes in a special section at the end of the work. Their argument is that this enables the notes to be printed in the same sized type as the main text, instead of in minute print below it; moreover the notes are not then so distracting to readers and can safely be ignored by those who cannot be bothered to study them. The problem solved itself for me in that (a) the complexity of my subject rendered the provision of extensive notes important and (b) some notes applied to more than one bibliographical entry in "A Guide to Edward S. Ellis." Consequently my notes are full and are assembled in a separate chapter. Fortunately, it seems likely that the index

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and the notes can form a separate volume in "A Guide to Edward S. Ellis," thereby facilitating ready cross-reference.

The card index of information about Edward S. Ellis' many publishers helps me to build up the publication patterns of works issued in a number of different editions, often over a long span of years.

Let us now turn our attention to library reference works and what better approach than to follow the sequence in Mr. Bales' article? The *Union List of Serials*. This is indeed a valuable guide to holdings of periodicals, but it should not be accepted at its face value. The list is only as reliable as the information provided to its compiler and, like all such reference works, suffers from a lack of continuous revision and amendment. That is an inherent weakness in many reference works and I am not suggesting that the *Union List of Serials* is either better or worse than most similar guides. What I am pointing out, however, is that it would be naive to plan a research trip without verifying the *Union List of Serials* entry with the library concerned. I have used the *Union List of Serials* frequently over the years and have had many disappointments—instances of plain inaccuracy ("we do not have and never have had such a holding"), instances of partial inaccuracy ("the *Union List of Serials* is incorrect; our holdings consists of a few scattered issues and is not complete as listed"), instances of disposals ("our holding was in such poor condition that it was sent for re-pulping some years back") and, instances of losses ("the run in which you are interested disappeared from the shelves many years ago and has not been found despite periodical intensive searches"). So as to be absolutely fair I must add that, in one or two memorable instances, I have found libraries to possess larger runs than stated in the *Union List of Serials*! It is also not unlikely that runs of many periodicals are housed in American reference libraries, which have never been recorded in the *Union List of Serials*.

The Union List of Newspapers. Much the same strictures apply to the use of this work as apply to the use of the *Union List of Serials*, although I have found it marginally less unreliable than that work. It is a good idea to consult the *Union List of Newspapers* when you draw blank in the *Union List of Serials* and Vice Versa. The demarcation between newspapers and periodicals is not clear cut. For example "The Dollar Newspaper" of Philadelphia was more of a story paper than a newspaper.

Newspapers present special research problems, in that literary material often did not appear in all editions. Some papers confined their fiction to the Saturday and/or Sunday editions, while others reversed the process by serialising from Monday through Friday, but not over the weekends. Some papers offered a serial in the evening edition only and others issued a separate literary edition weekly. In some cases the fiction was printed in a special literary section or regularly on a particular page, while in others the editor just fitted it in where he had space to spare. On rare occasions serialization was sporadic instead of continuous. When you check with a reference library, therefore, it is sensible to ask if they would be good enough to look at a small sample of the period in which you are interested in order to advise you what appears to have been the editorial policy of the paper in regard to fiction at that time. Incidentally the large public libraries nearly all have more or less complete runs of the newspapers which circulated in their cities, often on microfilms.

The National Union Catalog. Monumental this bibliography certainly is, but even so it is no more than a starting off point for research, in that its coverage is by no means exhaustive. Even the magnificent Pre-1956 Imprints is not an infallible fount of information. The entries for Edward S. Ellis in

that work cover several pages, but neither list all the holdings of his works in American reference libraries nor are free from error. When you have occasion to write to a library, which you have not contacted before, it is a good idea to include a polite request for a brief check list of its holdings of books by the author or on the subject you are researching. Subject listings may not be forthcoming so readily as author listings, but there is no harm in asking.

The United States Catalog. This work is most useful as a supplementary aid to the National Union Catalog and the Publishers Trade List Annuals. In my opinion it provides a much better record from 1912 onwards than for the earlier years which, after all, are the ones in which the interest of the majority of HHB members is likely to lie. It is a good starter for the checklist stage of research interest.

The Publishers Trade List Annual. This is far and away the most valuable standard library reference tool mentioned in Mr. Bales' article, because it contains the trade catalogues of publishers. Here you have what the publishers offered for sale year by year. Of course mistakes did creep into publishers' catalogues and indeed, in some instances, books were catalogued in advance of publication and then were not in fact published after all. I understand that the Henry Altemus Company of Philadelphia was one of the publishers guilty of that unfortunate practice. On the whole, however, the P. T. L. A. is the most comprehensive and reliable source of information available. It is an absolute must for the research worker intent on building up the publication pattern of a work.

It is disappointing, therefore, to find that this work has been sadly neglected by some of the big libraries. The British Museum, for example, ceased taking the P. T. L. A. after 1904. It is true that they started taking it again some years back but, alas, have been either unable or unwilling to make good the missing years. A leading public library in the States, which I visited in October, had a complete run, but the condition left much to be desired. For many years P. T. L. A.s were unwieldy volumes, which came apart at the seams with constant usage. At that point the Annuals should have been rebound without delay into several more manageable volumes instead of being allowed to disintegrate. I suspect the librarians well known predilection for first edition research has engendered a lack of appreciation of the significance of the Publishers Trade List Annuals. Before moving on I think I should add that even the P. T. L. A.s can be exasperatingly defective. For example the Edward Stratemeyer buff will not find many Saafield Publishing Company catalogues in a run of the P. T. L. A. Not all publishers could be bothered to supply a catalogue every year for inclusion in the Annual, but all the prestige publishers did so without fail. Incidentally the index to a P. T. L. A. sometimes provides information about the fate of the list of a firm that had gone out of business.

The Publishers Weekly. Mr. Bales is not strictly accurate when he says that one can locate the date a company was founded, who owned it, when it changed hands, what firm succeeded it, etc., in the Publishers Weekly. The truth is that one may find such information; equally one may not. Even though the Publishers Weekly is something of a hit or miss source of information, it certainly merits careful study—if you have the time and the perseverance to comb through it over the years of your interest. The record of defunct publishing firms is a useful adjunct to the Publishers Weekly, but would have been even better if the record had been more informative—e.g., had given years of change, reason for change, such as bankruptcy, etc. Indeed a cross-reference index to the Publishers Weekly, with an amplification of the record, would be an admirable project.

The information in the Publishers Weekly is scattered unevenly throughout a number of regular features, such as the Literary and Trade Notes, the Obituary Notes, the Personal Notes and the Business Notes. It follows that you skim at your peril. Directories of Publishers and Spring & Fall special issues were valuable occasional features. The student of the dime novel will also find it rewarding to seek and study files of the Publishers Weekly's predecessor, the American Literary Gazette and Publishers Circular.

Subject guides, such as Poole's Index to Periodical Literature, have not proved of any real help for my researches, but that may be merely because the area of project was to a large extent virgin bibliographical soil. Generally speaking, however, you should not expect too much from a subject index, since the compiler almost certainly did not have your particular type of project in mind when he was preparing it and so the odds are against your finding just what you want.

Where the standard reference work you wish to consult is too expensive for you to buy and the nearest library holding it too far away for you to visit, you may be able to obtain it on inter library loan through your local library; you may then be able to obtain xerox reproductions of the important parts for permanent reference purposes.

In addition to standard reference works, attention should be paid to other works, which have achieved a less widespread circulation. Among the most important are the two dozen bibliographical listings published by our editor. These follow a common format, which introduces a chronological listing with a potted history of the publication in question and follows it with an author index and a few useful notes. The publication of these listings has placed on permanent record the contents of Army & Navy Weekly, Beadle's Frontier Series, Boys' Holiday/Holiday, Boys of America (Street & Smith), Boys of America (Frank Leslie), Boys of New York, Bright Days, Frank Leslie's Boys' & Girls' Weekly, Golden Argosy/Argosy (including the English edition of Golden Argosy), Golden Weekly, Good News, Hearthstone (of Philadelphia), Literary Album, Irwin P. Beadle's Ten Cent Novels/Munro's Ten Cent Novels, New Buffalo Bill Weekly, Nick Carter Library, Nickel Library, Rough Rider Weekly, Saturday Night, Young Men of America and Wide-Awake Library. Inevitably these records are concise, but even so they can relieve the new research worker of a great deal of time consuming or, alternately, expensive searching. All the periodicals listed are in the field in which "Round-Up" readers' interest is likely to occur. Moreover the names of their authors—such HHB stalwarts as Randolph Cox, J. P. Guinon, the late Professor Albert Johannsen, Edward T. LeBlanc, Capt. Chester G. Mayo, Stanley A. Pachon and the Rev. Donald Steinhauer—are a guarantee of accuracy and excellence.

A run of "The Dime Novel Round-Up" is also a mine of information. Unfortunately only Nos. 1 through 231 have been indexed and so our magazine's value as a research tool has not yet been fully established. An index, compiled with the guidance of our editor and his advisory committee, would be a worthwhile project of lasting value, especially if it were updated by supplements every year thereafter and re-issued, say, every fifth year.

There is no space to touch on more than a few other works. Dictionaries of authors are sometimes useful as a launching pad for research. A number of such dictionaries exist, which are confined to a particular region; consequently it can be worth while writing to the main reference library in the area in which the author of your interest lived, if you find no trace of him in the well known national author dictionaries. You will find most librarians pleased to help, always provided your enquiry is to the point.

In the Collector's Bookshelf column of "The Round-Up" our editor gives details of books likely to be of interest to HHB members, of which he has been made aware. These are mostly new publications, but I am hoping that he will consider expanding the feature to include out of print works that continue to be cited frequently—e.g., Quentin Reynolds' "The Fiction Factory" and Mary Noel's "Villains Galore!" The new research worker would find it beneficial, I am sure, to have a candid review of such works, giving some assessment of their reliability, as well as a thumbnail resumé of their contents. After all the acquisition of reference works, whether new or second-hand, is expensive in these days of inflation and there is no point in buying the wrong research tool.

I had better close on a more precise note by setting out a few precepts for the research beginner, so here goes:

- a. plan the scope of your project and then resist the temptation to alter it;
- b. plan and execute your research methodically, thereby avoiding waste of precious time;
- c. never forget the bibliographer's motto: "More haste, less speed";
- d. note your sources for future reference;
- e. build up your personal records in card index form so as to facilitate rearrangement as your research progresses;
- f. always frame enquiries precisely and, if practicable, concisely;
- g. always be reasonable when seeking help;
- h. always acknowledge help and information given, especially in published material;
- i. ensure that the layout of your bibliography—or article for that matter—is logical and fully explained;
- j. always distinguish hypothesis from fact.

DIME NOVEL COLLECTORS BOOKSHELF

FRANK MERRIWELL'S SEARCH. Publisher: Zebra Books, 380 Madison Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10017. \$1.50 in paperback. This bears the copyright date of 1901 and is evidently a reprint of the original Merriwell story. (Information sent in by Gregory Jackson of Los Angeles). I haven't been able to locate one on the shelves of local book stores in this area (Massachusetts) yet.

LOUISE HARRIS JOINS THE RANKS OF ROUNDUP SUBSCRIBERS

History buffs on both shores of the Atlantic are interested in Louise Harris, Rhode Island writer, and her nationwide effort to have the James Bailey Upham stamp a feature of the Bicentennial Observance. She asserts that it was he who made the American flag a "familiar" to school children across the country, and contends that it was Upham not Francis Bellamy, alleged author, who wrote the Gledge of Allegiance. Mr. Upham was the architect off "The Youth's Companion" Flag Program which led to the writing of the Pledge for the School Celebration of the 400th Anniversary of Columbus coming to America.

Miss Harris, a Brown University alumna and descendant of Rhode Island's founding fathers, is an internationally recognized basic researcher in "The Youth's Companion" memorabilia. Her focus is on C. A. Stephens, its star reporter and columnist for more than 60 years of its 100-year history. It was she who established the C. A. Stephens Collection at the University.

NEWS NOTES

Clarence M. Fink contributed an article about the collecting of old-fashioned nose glasses which was published in the March 1975 issue of Popular Handicraft Hobbies. This magazine is published by the Tower Press, Box 428, Seabrook, N. H. 03874.

MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

- 315 Jack Bales, 305 E. Leo St., Apt. A, Eureka, Illinois 61530 (New address)
 339 Louise Harris, 15 Jay St., Rumford, R. I. 02916 (New member)
 340 David L. Greene, P. O. Box 368, Demorest, Georgia 30535 (New member)
 341 John R. Ruckel, 78-47 86th St., Glendale, N. Y. 11227 (New member)
 252 James Pollock, 100 Walton Dr., Apt. 19, Lynchburg, Va. 24502 (New address)

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 And many others. Sales lists welcomed.

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Back numbers Reckless Ralph's Dime Novel Roundup (quite a few reprints, can't be helped). Don't have the complete set of No. 1 to 237 inclusive, but almost, lacking only a few numbers. 10c each or \$21.00 postpaid. Have at least 230 numbers or more. Also two indexes, 1 Pioneer and Scouts of the Old West, Birthday number, War Library list and Dime Novel Catalog.

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